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ABSTRACT

This tip sheet outlines the steps academic and vocational educators can take to document the skills needed in the workplace, the skills their students will need in the future, and those currently being taught in the curriculum. Step 1, visit a workplace, includes these activities: choosing the workplace to visit and calling to make arrangements, determining one's involvement, making observations during the visit, interviewing a worker, and thanking the individual who arranged the visit. Step 2, inventory the curriculum, addresses considering one's teaching strategies and documenting the academic and employability skills addressed one's classroom, cluster, or school. Step 3, align one's curriculum, offers these detailed suggestions: align one's curriculum, locate gaps between what students will need and what the teacher is currently doing, determine and prioritize goals, and clarify changes with colleagues and students. Forms for educator use are provided. A section for notes from observations, interviews, and curriculum review provides space for business/industry name, date, job title of interviewee, general description of the scope of work for this job, describe the working environment, and describe the materials used in the workplace. Separate skills profiles are included for foundation skills and five competencies. These tables describe the skill and provide space for notes from the observation/interview and the curriculum review. (YLB)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Documenting Academic and Employability Skills Needed in the Workplace and Found in the Curriculum

The workplace of tomorrow will look very different from what we see today. The days of a job for life are gone. The young people in our schools today will face a fluid career track, where their ability to be flexible and adapt to a changing marketplace will be their most valuable skill. Success in their future careers will depend on their mix of skills, from academic to technical competencies to more general employability skills, as described by the SCANS report submitted in 1991 by the U. S. Department of Labor.

Teaching this new mix of skills has been an ongoing challenge for secondary and postsecondary educators. This challenge has led academic educators to begin using hands-on, applied methodologies and occupational teachers to begin incorporating academic skills into their instruction. The employability skills (or Five Competencies) that are discussed by the SCANS report must also be included as critical process skills for our students.

Before arbitrarily revising your curriculum, however, you should take the time to find out for yourself what skills your students will need in the future. A visit to a workplace can give you some insight into the environment your students will face when they finish high school or postsecondary education. Remember—even college graduates must eventually face the world of work!

This Tip sheet will outline the steps you can take to document the skills needed in the workplace and those currently being taught in your curriculum.

I. VISIT A WORKPLACE

A. Choose the workplace you will visit and call to make arrangements.
This could be a business or industry that relates to your discipline or occupational area. It may be small or large. You could choose one that has hired your graduates in the past.

B. Determine your involvement.

1. Shadow and interview a worker for a day or two.
2. Tour a worksite and interview several workers. You may go as a group of teachers, spread out into the worksite to collect information from more than one employee in the company, then share observations at the end of the experience.
3. Do an internship (1-3 weeks) at the site and actually participate in day to day activities.

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"Improving the bottom line by improving the written line."

C. **During your visit make observations.**

1. Observe the working environment. How are workers dressed? Are there special uniforms or clothing restrictions? Does the worksite have offices, cubicles, and/or a large production area? Is the work done outside or offsite? What equipment or technology seems to be available?
2. Observe materials used in the workplace. Do you see the tools for reading, writing and mathematics such as books, manuals, signs, posters, computers, writing materials, rulers, calculators, forms, graphs, charts, etc.?
3. Observe the academic and employability skills being used by workers and take notes.

D. **Interview a worker.**

1. Explain your notetaking to your interviewee:

   "I am trying to find out what skills my students would need if they chose to work in a business or industry like this one. This information will help me adjust my curriculum so my students will be better prepared. Thanks for your help."

2. Ask the worker to describe, in general, what they do.
3. Listen for evidence of the academic and employability skills and take notes.
4. Express your thanks for the experience to the worker whose time has been interrupted to answer your questions.

E. **Thank the individual who arranged your visit**, in person and with a follow-up letter.

II. INVENTORY YOUR CURRICULUM

A. **Consider your teaching strategies**, textbooks and other teaching resources, student projects, homework assignments, etc.

B. **Document** the academic and employability skills addressed in your classroom, cluster, or school.

III. ALIGN YOUR CURRICULUM

A. **Align your curriculum**, as appropriate, to the workplace skills you documented.

B. **Locate gaps** between what your students will need and what you are currently doing.

C. **Determine and prioritize goals.** You may decide to include more project-based activities, conduct some joint activities with other teachers, add authentic assessments to assignments, or provide more workplace experiences for your students.

D. **Clarify changes with colleagues and students.** Take time to explain your planned changes with colleagues and students. They may have other good ideas that will enhance your efforts!

What we must do in schools today is to provide opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate the skills they will need to be successful in the future.

What can you do to make this possible?

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Notes from observations, interviews, and curriculum review

Name of Business/Industry: _____ **Date:** _____

Job Title (if specific individual is interviewed): _____

General description of the scope of work for this job:

Describe the working environment *(workspace, specialized clothing, etc.):*

Describe the materials used in the workplace *(tools for reading, writing, and mathematics such as books, manuals, signs, posters, computers, writing materials, rulers, calculators, forms, graphs, charts, etc.):*

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Skills Profile for _____ (Job Title)

FOUNDATION SKILLS:*	Observation/Interview	Curriculum Review
READING: Locates, understands, and interprets written information in prose and in documents–including manuals, graphs, and schedules–to perform tasks; learns from text; identifies relevant details, facts, and specifications; infers or locates the meaning of unknown or technical vocabulary; and judges the accuracy and plausibility of reports or proposals.		
WRITING: Communicates thoughts, ideas, information, and messages in writing; records information completely and accurately; composes and creates documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, proposals, graphs, flow charts; checks, edits, and revises for correct information, appropriate emphasis, form, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.		
LISTENING: Receives, attends to, interprets, and responds to verbal messages and other cues such as body language in ways that are appropriate to the purpose.		
SPEAKING: Organizes ideas and communicates oral messages appropriate to listeners and situations; participates in conversation, discussion, and group presentations; speaks clearly and communicates a message; understands and responds to listener feedback; and asks questions when needed.		
ARITHMETIC/MATHEMATICS: Performs basic computations and approaches practical problems by choosing appropriately from a variety of mathematical techniques. Uses tables, graphs, diagrams, and charts to obtain or convey quantitative information		

* Skills summarized from the *SCANS Report*, 1991.

Skills Profile for _____ (Job Title)

FOUNDATION SKILLS:*	Observation/Interview	Curriculum Review
THINKING SKILLS:		
Creative Thinking Uses imagination freely, combines ideas or information in new ways, makes connections between seemingly unrelated ideas, and reshapes goals in ways that reveal new possibilities.		
Decision Making Specifies goals and constraints, generates alternatives, considers risks, and evaluates and chooses best alternatives.		
Problem Solving Recognizes that a problem exists, identifies possible reasons for the discrepancy, and devises and implements a plan of action to resolve it. Evaluates and monitors progress, and revises plan as indicated by findings.		
Seeing Things in the Mind's Eye Organizes and processes symbols, pictures, graphs, objects or other information.		
Knowing How to Learn Recognizes and can use learning techniques to apply and adapt new knowledge and skills in both familiar and changing situations. Involves being aware of learning tools such as personal learning styles, formal learning strategies, and informal learning strategies.		
Reasoning Discovers a rule or principle underlying the relationship between two or more objects and applies it in solving a problem.		
PERSONAL QUALITIES:		
Responsibility Exerts a high level of effort and perservance towards goal attainment. Works hard to become excellent at doing tasks. Displays high standards of attendance, punctuality, enthusiasm, vitality, and optimism.		
Self-Esteem Believes in own self-worth and maintains a positive view of self.		
Sociability Demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy, and politeness in new and on-going group settings.		
Self-Management Assesses own knowledge, skills, and abilities accurately; sets well-defined and realistic personal goals; is a self-starter.		
Integrity Honesty Can be trusted.		

* Skills summarized from the *SCANS Report*, 1991.

Skills Profile for _____ (Job Title)

FIVE COMPETENCIES:*	Observation/Interview	Curriculum Review
RESOURCES: *Identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources.* Workers schedule time, budget funds, arrange space, or assign staff.		
INTERPERSONAL: *Works with others.* Competent employees are skilled team members and teachers of new workers; they serve clients directly and persuade co-workers either individually or in groups; they negotiate with others to solve problems or reach decisions; they work comfortably with colleagues from diverse backgrounds; and they responsibly challenge existing procedures and policies.		
INFORMATION: *Acquires and uses information.* Workers are expected to identify assimilate, and integrate information from diverse sources; they prepare, maintain, and interpret quantitative and qualitative records; they convert information from one form to another and are comfortable conveying information, orally and in writing, as the need arises.		
SYSTEMS: *Understands complex inter-relationships.* Workers should understand their own work in the context of the work of those around them; they understand how parts of systems are connected, anticipate consequences, and monitor and correct their own performance; they can identify trends and anomalies in system performance, integrate multiple displays of data, and link symbols (e.g., displays on a computer screen) with real phenomena (e.g., machine performance).		
TECHNOLOGY: *Works with a variety of technologies.* Technology today is everywhere, demanding high levels of competence in selecting and using appropriate technology, visualizing operations, using technology to monitor tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting complex equipment.		

* Skills summarized from the *SCANS Report*, 1991.